

Arranging hit on King

FRI DEC 17 1968

Ex-grill owner alleges plot

By SHEILA WISSNER
and KIRK LOGGINS

Staff Writers

Retired businessman Loyd Jowers, 67, told a national television audience last night he agreed to find a man to assassinate the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for money and friendship.

In an interview with Sam Donaldson broadcast on last night's *Primetime Live* program, Jowers said he found a killer as a favor for a friend, now-deceased Memphis

produce dealer Frank Liberto.

"Liberto done me a large favor, so I owed him a favor — or at least I thought I did," Jowers told Donaldson.

Jowers said Liberto eventually came to him to repay the favor. And it was a large favor, he said:

"He asked me to handle some money transactions. Hire someone to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King.

"He asked me if I knew someone. And I told him I thought I knew someone, I prob-

ably did."

Jowers said Liberto also offered to pay him a large sum, adding a "portion" of his motivation was money.

Asked by Donaldson if he found someone to kill King, Jowers replied: "Yes, sir."

But Jowers' lawyer, Lewis Garrison, cut short the questions, saying, "He cannot answer that ... He's gone as far as he can."

Jowers, who owned Jim's Grill in Memphis when King was assassinated April 4, 1968, said James Earl Ray did not kill the civil rights leader.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to King's murder, but recanted three days later, saying a

'done as favor'

man named Raoul had asked him to buy a rifle in a gun deal.

Ray, who was renting a room above Jim's Grill on the day King was killed, may not have known he was part of the conspiracy, Jowers said.

Liberto told him the police "wouldn't be there that night," Jowers said, and also told him there would be a "decoy" to draw suspicion away from those responsible.

Presumably, that decoy was Ray.

Jowers also said a man with a name sounding like "Raoul," who looked "Mexican" or possibly "part Indian," and talked with an accent, delivered to Jowers a rifle

for the killing.

Garrison said the real triggerman is believed to be still living and that "we are working currently to locate him."

Jowers and four others have asked for immunity to testify before a Memphis grand jury about the plot.

One of those five, Willie Akins, 63, told *The Tennessean* that Jowers has told him several times over the past 15 years that Jowers hired and paid the triggerman.

In his interview with Donaldson, Akins said an unnamed "friend" asked him to get

♦ Turn to PAGE 2A, Column 1



GARRISON



PIEROTTI

nity:

"There's a guy who says that he is guilty of a capital crime, and I'm supposed to give him immunity?"

Pierotti has said he will not call a grand jury to look into the conspiracy claims, which he terms a "sham."

"If there is a Mafia, and if they wanted somebody hit, they're sure not going to do it this way. They are not going to give it to some amateur who runs less than a five-star restaurant."

Pierotti also said he is going to stop talking to reporters about the case until more information is obtained:

"We can't do anything in this atmosphere. It's my policy to be as open as I can. But we can't do any work. ... I won't do interviews anymore. When we find out something, then we will tell you. We can't talk to you every day, all day long."

FROM PAGE 1A

someone "out of the way" because he was afraid the man would talk too much.

Akins said the "friend" eventually told him the person needed to be eliminated because "that was the man who killed King."

Donelson said that Akins told him he found the triggerman, a "slow-acting, kind of retarded black man," who disappeared before Akins could "pop him."

According to Donaldson, a Memphis woman saw Jowers disassembling a rifle moments after the shooting.

Another witness will say that Jowers showed him the rifle the day after the assassination and told him it was the weapon that killed the

civil rights leader, Donaldson reported.

In 1979, Donaldson said, a House subcommittee came across Liberto's name while investigating the King assassination. Subcommittee chairman Walter Fauntroy said a witness reported hearing Liberto say on the evening King was killed to "kill the s.o.b. — my brother in New Orleans is going to take care of you with \$5,000."

The brother in New Orleans was the chief aide to Carlos Marcello, a Mafia chief, Fauntroy said.

Shelby County District Attorney General John Pierotti has said he wants to talk with Akins, Jowers and the other witnesses:

"I think we would be derelict if we did not look into it."

But, the prosecutor said, he will not grant Jowers' request for immu-